

US EOP on HRC res 16/11
March 2011

The United States believes that protection of the environment and its contribution to sustainable development, human well-being, and the enjoyment of human rights are vitally important. In this spirit, we join consensus on this resolution in the expectation that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will prepare a report that will contribute to our understanding of the facts relating to human rights and the environment. However, we have concerns regarding the general approach of placing environmental concerns in the human rights context. We also have significant concerns regarding the appropriate mandates for UN fora, as well as on specific language in this resolution.

We remain uncomfortable with the proliferation of resolutions and decisions addressing environmental issues across the UN system, particularly in fora such as this Council, which has neither the mandate nor the expertise to address environmental issues. In discussions on international environmental governance and the institutional framework for sustainable development in other fora, such as the UN Environment Program and the preparatory meetings of Rio +20, there is consensus on the need to restrict discussion on environmental issues to fewer UN organizations and multilateral environmental agreements. This resolution counters those efforts and undermines attempts to streamline the UN system and improve its efficiency. There are more appropriate venues in which to meaningfully discuss and actively address environmental issues. We appreciate the efforts of our colleagues who work on environmental issues across the United Nations and we do not want to negatively impact their important work.

The United States supports the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, as agreed in 1992. While this resolution quotes only from Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration, we believe that every paragraph in this declaration is an important, carefully negotiated part of a larger whole. Language taken out of context from the larger text, therefore, may misrepresent the intention of the original declaration and risk undermining the approach of sustainable development, which strives to integrate all aspects of development in a mutually reinforcing way. We note that other provisions of the Rio Declaration -- particularly Principles 10, 20, 21, and 22 relating to public participation, access to information and justice, and participation of women, youth, and indigenous people -- are of more relevance to the requested report than Principle 7.

The United States understands and accepts that Rio Principle 7 highlights the special leadership role of the developed countries, based on our industrial development, our experience with environmental protection policies and actions, and our wealth, technical expertise and capabilities. The United States does not accept any interpretation of Principle 7 that would imply a recognition or acceptance by the United States of any international obligations or liabilities, or any diminution in the responsibilities of developing countries. Moreover, by joining consensus here, we are not changing our position on Rio Principle 3. As we noted at the Rio Conference, we understand the thrust of this citation to be that economic development goals and objectives must be pursued in such a way that the development and environmental needs of present and future generations are taken into account.